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ISLÂM AND IMAGE[1]

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
> Little we see in Nature that is ours.
> . . . . . .
> Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

The use of symbols springs from the human condition—from the perception of vital and cosmic correspondences, which was perhaps at its most seminal in archaic mankind. In the course of history, then, symbols live and change: once established in concrete forms, they may move from context to context and be used to diverse ends. It has been suggested that there might finally also be a death of symbols—

[1] A paper originally delivered at the 1962 conference of the American Society for the Study of Religion, where the theme was symbolism and imagery. The first paper was on the birth of symbols, and the second on their life. My paper came third; it has since been considerably revised. It presents certain themes which I am exploring in preparing my forthcoming history of Islâmic civilization, *The Venture of Islâm*. The numbers in parentheses refer to notes (printed at the end of this article) taken from a hurried letter by Oleg Grabar commenting on the manuscript. Though not originally intended for publication, they seemed too valuable to omit.

or, if not ultimately a death, at least some sort of desacralization, even if only temporary. Taking up the notoriously iconoclastic Islâm, it seems indicated for me to discuss the death of symbols. And this, in some sense, I do propose to do.

The death of a given symbol might be its transition into sheer ununderstood tradition and then, presumably, its use simply for its esthetic form: presumably what Shell Oil Company has in mind in using the ancient shell symbol of femininity and fertility. If we are concerned not so much with individual symbols as with the whole symbol world, we can hardly expect symbolism as such to die; but it may (I suppose) for a time be displaced by the world of concepts: of elements having primarily an informative effect rather than primarily an evocative effect. In either case, the eclipse of the symbol, so far as it has taken place, would seem to be largely a Modern matter. It has come with science and technology and the general disruption of the limited religio-civilizational traditions of a more agrarian age.

Now I do think that Modernity, in the specific sense of the social transformations launched in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe, is of crucial and essentially unparalleled significance in the history of human symbolization. By the side of what has happened in Modern times, all earlier desacralization of symbols was relatively minor. But I think that one will find at least some analogs in certain facets of what happened in Medieval Islâmic society; and I think these analogs will relate even to some of the social roots of the Modern crisis of the symbol. I think no one insists more than I on the uniqueness of the Modern experience, paralleled really by none of the great cultural florescences within agrarian-urban times, paralleled only by the advent of agriculture, or at least of urban civilization itself. Yet I think there were some instructive anticipations of certain aspects of Modernity in Medieval Islâmic society, and that Islâmic iconophobia and its associated phenomena have some relation to those anticipations. (I shall restrict myself in this discussion, on the whole, to the situation prevailing *subsequently* to the decisive formulation of Islâmic culture under the Classical ᶜAbbâsids; but stopping short around 1500, when further developments had altered conditions so much as to introduce a different atmosphere.)

ISLÂMIC SYMBOLIZATION

From some points of view, the most important thing one can say about symbolism in Medieval Islâm is that it was by no means dead. The Medieval Islâmic was an agrarian-urban society of the Medieval period and always depended on symbols for self-expression, like any

other such society. This is obvious in all realms apart from the strictly religious. Surely there is something symbolic about the classical Persian garden, which must have trees and a stream (even if no flowers); and it is no accident that Paradise was precisely a garden with trees and streams. The garden symbolism can then be brought indoors, with a garden-*carpet* (1). Within the cult itself there are the evident, if marginal, symbolisms in such things as the Black Stone at Mecca.

The most luxuriant material for studying symbols among Muslims is of course their poetry. In the symbols of moth and flame, of rose and nightingale, of wine and love, of the water, of the phoenix, and so on, we have not merely metaphor or allegory but real symbolism: that interresonance of disparate points of experience which, through some common structural character, serve to illuminate one another and to enrich one another's implications. One could illustrate through the *ghazals* of Ḥâfiẓ how many levels the symbolism of the rose and the nightingale can operate on, how many contraries it can bring into a single image. And, on occasion, some of the symbols of the Medieval Islâmic poetry are in turn reflected in figural art.

But it is the most intimate realm of religion which is the life of symbolism at its fullest, just as symbolism is generally felt to be the most adequate outer expression of religion. Already in the poetry of the Muslims it will be noticed that it is in precisely the Ṣûfî or the Ṣûfî-tinged poetry (which we have just cited) that the symbolism is richest, or at least most resonant. A symbolic expression of the intuitions of Muslim faith can be expected to remain at the heart of the symbolic life of Muslim peoples, as of other peoples.

In a measure, this expectation is realized. The great *religious* symbol, the great concrete image in Islâm, one can almost say, is the Qurʾân. Wherever other faiths call for some symbolic presence, even for a symbolic gesture, Islâm presents the Qurʾân or some fragment of it. The Muʿtazilîs would be glad to point out that the more extreme exalters of the Qurʾân were practically idolizing it: the Book was eternal, was an attribute of God as identical with His speech, and the paper-and-ink copies of it were sanctified images of it and were sometimes practically exalted as themselves sharing the eternal divine character. The words of the Qurʾân are, certainly, above all evocative and only incidentally informative, in the ordinary Muslim experience: they function as symbols sooner than as simple concepts. It is in this sense that calligraphic art can be far more than decorative, can be full of symbolic meaning.

Yet there are some obvious points of difference from other religious

cultures. Those who look for symbolism in Muslim faith and even in Islâmic culture at large will find their richest quarry only on the verbal level, where indeed all societies are pretty rich. And even here, in poetry especially, there is a certain discontinuity. Some of the more archaic symbols persist: the pearl, the sun; above all, water; but the symbol of wine and the cup and the cupbearer has seen at least a displacement of emphasis; and such a common Muslim symbolism as that of the moth and the candle is, I believe, not commonly found on the archaic level at all; though I suppose it might be likened to certain others if the feeling back of it is fully generalized to its most basic human characters (at which level no new symbolism could ever be possible). For a classical persistence of a wide range of Jungian symbols, say, one will have to turn either to folklore or to that most esoteric of the many Medieval Islâmic esotericisms, alchemy; but not to the central ceremonies of public worship.

What I am going to discuss, then, is this difference, this apparent displacement in symbolization in the Islâmic cultures; and I shall include the outward expression of Muslim faith as a part of culture. It is finally a matter of *emphasis* within Islâmic culture, I think, rather than any total contrast. No major aspect of human life, certainly not symbolism, can be ruled out by any given society; but it may be made to play a special role, and its development may be channeled differently, and perhaps even partially limited, by social conditions.

THE "ARIDITY" OF ISLÂM

Historians and outsiders generally have tended to find Islâm relatively arid and uninteresting. They have found the *religion* arid, to begin with. Indeed, the religion has had a tremendous popular appeal throughout a large part of the world. But those who are not ready to convert, but whose curiosity is yet aroused by things exotic (for instance modern Western scholars), are generally more moved by the profundities of Buddhism or the paradoxes of Hinduism. This sense of aridity holds even more for the Islâmic civilization as a whole. We have learned to have enormous latent respect for "India" and "China," which yield inexhaustibly rich materials for the romantic imagination. Compared to these, the romantic appeal of "Islâm" is rather jejune. It tends to be reduced to the call of the desert.

I think that even Islâmicists tend to feel this way. Indicists and especially Sinologists, I think, are usually drawn to their studies by a direct attraction for the respective cultures. Western Islâmicists have very often been led sidewise into their fields; they started out with an interest in Semitic studies or in European diplomatic history or in the

problems of the mission field or of colonial administration, and found themselves dragged into Arabic philology or Ottoman history or Muslim law. Once there, they did their best to understand. But I retain the feeling that a large proportion of Western Islâmicists have a more or less uncomplimentary view of Islâmic culture generally—and especially of those parts of it they have not specialized in. Arabists are sometimes a bit anti-Arab, but then they positively scorn non-Arab Islâm; Turkists (like some modern Turks themselves) are inclined to see Islâm as something of a burden upon the vigor of a noble people. At any rate, as compared with Sinologists, Indicists, and even Assyriologists and Egyptologists, one less often gets the feeling from Islâmicists of a missionary zeal to make known the virtues of their chosen culture to an unappreciative West. (I must except men like Massignon and Corbin.)

It is not just a matter of "stagnation," though it is sometimes put this way. Any pre-Modern culture which has survived into Modern times must give an impression of rigidity and stagnation from the viewpoint of a Modern, except under special circumstances which did not hold for Islâm. The innumerable inquests scholars make into "what went wrong with Islâm" concern more than this. There is an explicit sense of aridity, of cultural thinness. Islâmic culture is almost regularly characterized by what it did *not* have. The culture did not have true feudalism, did not have municipalities; the faith did not have priests, did not have dramatic myths. The committee that asked me for this paper brought up the classic case: Islâm's iconoclasm. Why the resistance to visual images, and what may have been substituted for them? The question is perfectly friendly, but it leads us directly to the perplexing point.

Surely the sense that what is distinctive about Medieval Islâmic culture is its lacks—and, more generally, the whole negative tendency in Western views of Islâm—are partly due to an accident of history which affects scholarly research: Islâm is closely related, as a religion and as a culture, to Christendom, and has been the chief immediate rival of the West. It was not only its rival in the Mediterranean in Medieval times; more important, as the most widespread of Old World civilizations, Islâm, from Hungary to Java, was the only serious rival of the West for world hegemony in early Modern times. Because of the common historical origins, superficial comparisons have been easy; because of the persistent rivalry, they have tended to be invidious. But I think this fact has been secondary in accounting for the Western negative tendency.

The same is true of a more genuine occasion for a negative judg-

ment, its purely Medieval character. In contrast notably to the European, Indic, and Chinese traditions, the Semitic-Iranian tradition, which is the core of Islâmic culture, is not readily viewed as a single whole, because of the severe discontinuities which separate one age from another: the Cuneiform from the Aramaic and Pahlavi, and the latter from the Arabic and Persian. The negative impression might then seem to be a function of the categories we happen to use. "Islâm," as a term for a faith and for a culture, represents primarily only the latest segment of the longer tradition of the Middle East. The term fails to cover what in other areas is the Classical period, separately reckoned in the Middle East under the heading of Hebrew and Zoroastrian cultures, etc.; for although Islâm in fact presupposes these, it did not, as such, directly make them its own. Eliminate all that flowered before A.D. 600 from China and India, and each will appear markedly less rich as a culture. Or take the Semitic-Iranian tradition as a whole from the first millennium B.C. through the Middle Ages, and the impression of aridity may yield to one of luxuriance. Yet it is not accidental that we conceive Islâm in what, from a world-historical viewpoint, is a temporally truncated form. It was the Muslims themselves who turned their backs on the classical Semitic and Iranian languages and rejected, so far as possible, their heritages. We must ask why Muslims had so negative an attitude to cultural resources which were certainly not excluded by the Qurʾân itself.

The problem was once focused suggestively by A. L. Kroeber, who spoke of civilization as analogous to a fire which burns out the areas in which it flourishes so that after a certain peak has been reached, later cultural expressions, if they are to be creative in any sense, must be so by way of purging and restriction rather than by way of fresh cultural construction and growth. His most effective example here was sculpture, which began in the Middle East; spread early to southeast Europe, north India, and later to China, centers of civilization only somewhat less early than the Middle East; and had already died out even in these later areas by the time it was reaching its greatest triumphs in more recent lands of civilization, Indo-China and Malaysia, Japan, and Western Europe. Except in China, most of the effects he cited were, in fact, associated, directly or indirectly, with Islâm; or, put rather more accurately, with a broad iconophobic movement which found its most extensive expression in Islâm. The expansion of this iconophobia largely followed the expansion of Islâm itself over the map, and in any case formed a single process, whether we regard Byzantine iconoclasm as partly stimulated by Islâm or merely as arising from the same ultimate historical sources (2). As Kroeber saw

it, this iconophobia was but the most obvious example of a series of other cultural facts, associated with it and interpretable in a like manner. In effect, Kroeber made the problem of Islâmic iconoclasm a key to the problem of civilization itself. If symbolism was dying in Islâm, the implication of his idea is that the death of symbolism—and doubtless the spread of Islâm itself—meant the death, or contraction, of culture as a whole; and that this might well happen at last universally.

A somewhat different facet of the same basic approach is put forward by Carleton Coon in his description of the effects of the secularly contracting economy of the Arid Zone. He suggests that, as land resources were gradually used up under uncontrolled land use in circumstances of aridity, social ways were adopted which conserved social energies, presumably at the expense of either venturesomeness or monumentality in art and other work of the mind.

Such theories in themselves do not carry us very far beyond posing the problem why this should be so, if it is. We must look more closely at the particular aspects of Medieval Islâmic faith and culture which give rise to such impressions of cultural contraction. One major source of them clearly lies in the nature of Islâmic art; more particularly, in the relation between religion and art in Islâmic culture. I doubt if there was a simple substitution of something else for the plastic image in Islâm. To some degree, iconophobia reflected a mistrust of the symbol itself. I suspect that Islâm had a directive effect on the whole mythopeic and imagistic and symbolic side of life which was reflected as much in literature as in art, and which was a continuation and intensification of a trend developing earlier among the Semitic and Iranian peoples. That is, that the phenomena at issue are in part deeply moral and religious; the particular limitations on figural art in devotional contexts form only one phase of something more complex and pervasive.

THE MIDDLE EASTERN AVOIDANCE OF SACRED STATUARY

As we know, the tendency to avoid plastic imagery for devotional purposes seems to have been marked in the whole Semitic-Iranian tradition from the time that Zoroastrianism and Judaism became major influences. In contrast to earlier Middle Eastern ways and to the continuing European and Indic (and then Chinese) ways, the cult came to center in most cases on something other than sacred statues. This in itself is surprising only given the Afro-Eurasian historical context: many cults do not use sacred statues, but the disuse of them in the Middle East stood against a highly attractive prevailing usage.

At least two traits in this tendency must be distinguished. First, it was associated with a certain moralism. Whatever may have been the origins of this distinction, the Hebrew and Iranian prophetic traditions came to foster it. It has been pointed out that in the Middle East the old local nature gods and indeed the alien nature gods of Hellenism were worshipped in statues, while the moral deities of Zoroaster and Isaiah were not. The various new religions of a Mazdean, Judaic, or Gnostic cast were more or less at one in this, even though they often did not impose actual taboos on cult use of statuary (and still less of painting or even depiction in relief). The real symbols of angels in a moral cosmic order were stars or elements or human beings themselves, rather than statues. In these circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that the difference in cult pattern was sometimes exalted to a defensive prohibition. When zealous Jewish writers inveigh against the use of statues, it is as implying a cult alternative to that of the Lord, not as a possible method of worshiping Him Himself. The same mood prevails in Muslim writers against idols (3). In the rejection of cult images it remains important, in the Middle East, that the use of images in the cult had often implied the presence of old or alien deities opposed to the moral cosmic order revealed by the prophets. Men of a moralistic tendency might well mistrust any religious figural art.

Second, it was associated with a certain rejection of the exploiting, privileged classes. Fine art in its more cultivated forms has inevitably been associated with wealth and luxury. The attitude of the Hebrew prophets is well known. We may move closer to the immediate background of Islâm. The monumental art, especially the reliefs, we have from Sâsânî times is the art of royal rather than of priestly luxury. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that religious sentiment was concentrated on the absolute monarch more totally than it was, say, on the sacred king in Medieval France; whatever is prominent must receive some sort of consecration. But it does suggest that the grander forms of depictive art tended to be associated with the monarchical power, its pride and its luxury. Is it too much to suggest that men who disliked overweening state power might have occasion, under appropriate circumstances, to mistrust monumental fine art as such?

I think the moralism of these faiths, their rejection of other values than immediately moral ones, is part of a wider range of tendencies which were at least adumbrated in the ancient Middle East and which came to fruition in the intellectual life of the Islâmic cities. These tendencies provide the relevant context for understanding Islâmic iconophobia. I shall sum them up under the catchwords "moralism,"

"populism," and "factualism" and "historicalism." I think these tendencies formed one possible response to the situation which had arisen universally in the Afro-Eurasian civilized regions in the first millennium B.C. Then the scale of intermingling of various cultural traditions, and the relative personal independence of at least the craftsmen and merchant classes, seem to have contributed to the atmosphere in which arose so many exponents of individual moral and intellectual responsibility from the Mediterranean to China. Among the followers of the cults that arose in this period in the Middle East, we often find a concern for a more or less egalitarian social justice as against the injustices of the time and, almost always, a hopeful attention to the over-all course of history in which right may finally prevail; together with concern for the personal moral responsibility of all ordinary people. These two concerns seem naturally to have issued in communal faiths with universal claims keyed to the needs of the common man, in which allegiance to the human religious community as such was much more stressed than it was, for instance, in most faiths of Indic origin.

RISE OF SHARÎ'AH-MINDEDNESS DOMINATED BY MORALIST-POPULIST SOCIAL IDEALS

Islâm was heir to these tendencies both through its origin in Muḥammad's preaching and through its further development among the Middle Eastern populations. Early Muslim thinkers were unusually rigorous in eliminating any elitism from within the community; and this populist orientation was interpreted moralistically. In the Sharî'ah, Muslims combined the hope for social justice with the stress on the ordinary man's moral status by vesting historical and social responsibility in each believer individually. In this spirit, social legitimacy of every kind was made to depend on the range of awareness, in principle, of the common believer; any insight not essentially accessible to the common man came readily to be suspect as antisocial. This point of view was made possible, and then reinforced, by a strong sense of allegiance to the historical religious community. Constistent with this moralistic populism, I think, was something that may be called factualism: a cultivation of common-sense and matter-of-fact reality, with low tolerance for abstractions or imaginative symbolism, subtle or profound. Both the moral-populistic and the factualistic types of attitude were maintained among the same crucial intellectual elite in Islâm.

One cannot derive all this directly from the Qur'ân, though it is one legitimate development of its spirit. From almost the beginning, his-

torical circumstances determined which of several possible courses would be taken. It is these, and not some supposed absolutes metaphysically inherent in Islâm, which determined the constellation of opinions and expectations which resulted in the particular compromises which marked out the range and force of Islâmic iconoclasm. I shall not try to relate all this to the development of Jewish iconoclasm, or of Byzantine, except to note that they all had common social roots (4). A comparative study of all the Semitic-Iranian faiths would be necessary to establish a full analysis of the dynamics of iconophobic tendencies. But I think something can be accomplished for Islâm alone.[2] We must first review the way in which the older moralistic tendencies came to be entrenched in a peculiarly authoritative position within the pattern of Islâm.

Historically speaking, of course, Islâm is an allegiance to a group, or to some fragment thereof, arising out of certain historical events. It brings with it, of course, certain key figures and phrases and, above all, the Qurʾân, as the central document of the historical events in question; but in itself Islâm cannot be presented as a complete set of ideas or of practices, spiritual, political, or otherwise, except by a more or less arbitrary abstraction from what, in fact, the majority of the historical Muslim community has associated with it. For instance, it is impossible to deduce a single, solely legitimate system of "Islâm" simply by a logical unfolding of what is implicit in the Qurʾân. Even on points of detail, it is known that the Qurʾân was not necessarily followed. It urges the use of written documents in contracts, for instance, in contrast to the spirit of the Sharîʿah law; and in particular it has no special hostility to the plastic arts, such as was developed later (but not much at first) among many pious Muslims, while it inveighs more against poetry, which the same pious Muslims often held in high honor. I am not saying that inherent logical consistency did not, in fact, play a large part in forming historical Islâm in its several varieties. I merely want to stress, for the understanding of Islâmic iconophobia, the degree to which, in its formation and even in its perpetuation, effective Islâm has been a social context which influences the spiritual life of individuals, like any other aspect of their life, in different ways and degrees according to the circumstances and the individual. The question is, then, what role adherence to Islâm played in the further development of the Semitic-Iranian tendency to avoid the use of cult images.

[2] Cf. Gustav von Grunebaum, "Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment," *History of Religions*, Vol. II (1962), where, incidentally, essential bibliography will be found.

The wars of the Riddah, when the authority of the Muslim community at Madînah was imposed on the various tribes that had accepted Muḥammad's leadership but had tried to go their private ways at his death, provide a first example of historical events delimiting Islâmic principles. These wars were almost as important in forming Islâm as was Pentecost in forming Christianity. The Riddah wars imposed a political unity on Islâm on the basis of rejection of the possibility of any new prophetic visions after Muḥammad. His mission was given an exclusive standing and his associates at Madînah were to be leaders in a common endeavor directed beyond Arabia itself; in which endeavor, however, all Muslims were to be basically equal. Two conceivably viable responses to the Qurʾân were thus ruled out: either a continuing prophetism in a culturally independent but fragmented Arabia, with new inspired men carrying on Muḥammad's tradition more or less autonomously; or an assimilation of Muḥammad's mission to the Old Testament, linking the new stirrings in Arabia to the ongoing life and politics of the surrounding societies and perhaps later submerging the Qurʾânic impulse into the older Hebrew tradition. Instead, Islâm was to maintain unity and independence but only through conquest of the lands about.

The political task so assumed, carrying a demand at once for close unity and for the essential equality which it presupposed, long ruled out or at least colored all attempts at introducing religious impulses which might seem to threaten the responsible political strength of the community. This egalitarian outlook was confirmed for a different set of reasons in influential opposition circles during subsequent generations. After the evolution of Islâmic power had evoked internal disagreements, some of those who opposed the ruling dynasty of Caliphs and its supporters did so precisely in the name of restoring a lost equality and homogeneity in political and social matters. This meant an appeal from the authority of power to the conscience of ordinary men. They proceeded to implement this appeal by forming what became the Sharîʿah law and its attendant disciplines.

Out of these opposition circles was developed, that is, one of the most potent traditions of interpreting Islâm: what may be called *Sharîʿah-mindedness*. This tradition proved politically and socially sufficiently viable to dominate, at least externally, all Islâm, both Sunnî and Shîʿî. It was generally acknowledged as the core of the historical Muslim faith. Thus by a combination of circumstances, Islâm came to the Middle East populations as the work of men of the *opposition* within a responsible *political* body, with strong *egalitarian* tend-

encies. This gave the populist-moralist conscience a political vantage point which it never lost.

We will be having occasion subsequently to discuss two tendencies other than Sharīᶜah-mindedness, which were almost equally early and equally widespread in Islâm as that was: *Tashayyuᶜ*, or ᶜAlid loyalism, and *Taṣawwuf*, or Ṣûfism. All three tendencies, which might indeed be combined within a single individual, went into forming historical Islâm. The social primacy of Sharīᶜah-mindedness was never denied, and it played the key role in making iconophobia an issue in Islâmic life. But the actual expression of iconophobia in society at large was determined by the interaction of Sharīᶜah-mindedness with the other main tendencies. In discussing Sharīᶜah Islâm first, we are merely establishing the setting for a larger picture.

It was in the Sharīᶜah, already given an egalitarian and oppositional-populist bias by the political circumstances we have traced (as well as because it did answer to a significant tendency in the Qurᵓân itself), that was further expressed a populist mood prevalent in the population of the Middle East at large as a result of still wider historical conditions. This was not, indeed, the only mood of that population (Ṣûfism and ᶜAlid loyalism reflected other moods), but it was an important one. One may suppose that a commercial culture will tend to be morally and culturally populist in the sense of stressing the interests of those who do not stand out for birth or for the kind of talents an aristocracy of birth is likely to value. The culture of the market place, unlike the culture of the court, must necessarily be shy of rank or personal distinction. It is by now commonplace that it throve on and in turn encouraged a comparatively open social mobility, based on recognition of more generally attainable virtues such as thrift and, in principle, honesty, rather than the more exotic virtues of the creative artist or scientist or even the soldier with his quick sense of honor. So far as "high culture" is concerned, it will be typically the bourgeois, living neither on the level of subsistence nor on the level of superfluous wealth, who can demand that his culture be sophisticated—above the peasant level; but cannot hope that it be luxurious—on the aristocratic level. This sort of intermediate norm, that of bourgeois morality and culture, forms at least one manner of responding to such a need, though perhaps not the only one. (5)

The Middle Ages seem in many parts of the Hemisphere to have been a time of great urban and commercial development; it is not only in Islâm that the bourgeois spirit was felt. One tendency common among the great confessional religions, with their frankly popular base, was to encourage their intellectual circles to avoid the overly re-

fined and to recognize as sound only that which was accessible, in principle, to the common man of the cities; and to attempt, in turn, to bring the common man into as much appreciation and participation as possible in that part of culture which most mattered, the elements of religion.

But it was most especially Islâm that tended to be identified with the international mercantile society of the Middle Ages; and it was Islâm that was most marked, of all the Medieval faiths, by a populist tendency. It became the dominant faith along the great lines of hemispheric interregional trade, both across Central Eurasia and in the Southern Seas from Egypt to China; this dominance in trading circles, in the end, accounted for much of its vast extension among the hinterlands from Morocco to Java, from the Sudan to Siberia. Perhaps a populist inclination was reinforced in the contrasting economy of the Arid Zone, which coincided with some of the trade-route centers. In any case, Islâmic society seems to have had a distinctly higher degree, in most areas where it spread, of social and geographical mobility than any other pre-Modern society. The vast spread of Islâm between A.D. 1000 and about A.D. 1500 or 1600 was assisted crucially by the fact that Muslim cadres were available to build upon a Muslim foothold wherever it was gained; that Islâm was freely open to all, of whatever background; and that once a Muslim in an Islâmic context, a man could rise to almost any height that special merit might win for him. The feudal and corporative orders of Europe, the bureaucratic aristocracy of China, even the castes of India by no means prevented all social or territorial mobility; but they did hinder it, while the corresponding institution of Islâm, the Sharîʿah, was designed to ensure any person's fitting into any niche in Islâmic society anywhere in the world, interchangeably.

ISLÂMIC POPULISM

At least two generations of Muslims, now, have been pointing out what they have called the "democratic" character of Muslim legal theory, with its profound distrust of state power and especially of any privileged status. This is not a fortunate word for the case; but it does mark the prominent place of populist tendencies in the attitudes of the Sharîʿah scholars, the ʿUlamâʾ. They did not, of course, simply reproduce popular feelings. Rather, they often stood in contrast to these. But they attempt to build a system morally *appropriate* to the common urban people as against a courtly society. Themselves, the ʿUlamâʾ formed, of course, something of an elite. But it was an elite devoted, in principle, to the people. They tried to bring the best in

culture to the ordinary people, but they were inclined to define that best in terms of what ordinary people might be expected to absorb.

Sharîʿah Islâm in Medieval Afro-Eurasia as a whole bears some analogies to Calvinist Christianity in early modern Western Europe. It was a faith of tradesmen and merchants who were doing well. In its moral sternness, its emphasis on law and order and on individual responsibility, its decentralizing of authority, its sense of the spiritual validity of worldly success—and even in such details as its rejection of the festivals of the agrarian calendar and (in the Sunnî majority) its doctrine of divine predestination, it was suited to the same sorts of needs as was Calvinism later in a smaller area. Like Calvinism, it was equally opposed to frivolous indulgences and to ascetic withdrawal.

One cannot stop with Calvinism. Even within the program of the Sharîʿah-minded themselves, some tendencies were developed further or more logically than were their analogues in Calvinism. But Calvinism in any case never informed so fully a complete society of all temperaments over centuries. To bring out the effects of the interaction of Sharîʿah-mindedness with the other major Islâmic tendencies, we shall at last find it necessary to make comparisons with certain trends in all Modern Western and perhaps especially in recent American life and art, which offer striking parallels even though not complete ones. The viewpoint of the Sharîʿah-minded themselves, however, can be illuminated by the comparison with Calvinism even when the two differ.

To begin with populism, then: the Sharîʿah-Islâmic populism was, like the Calvinist, moralistic. Indeed, the populism had decisive effects on the Sharîʿah moral doctrine, which it turned into a full moralism: a stress on immediate interpersonal moral duty at the expense of every other sort of value. Sharîʿah morality insisted on the duties of all individuals toward God and toward each other in fulfilling the requirements of everyday life, and paid little attention to outstanding achievement in exceptional activities of skill and talent, whether esthetic or otherwise. The ordinary individual must be an honest man; he will be concerned to do what is useful, rather than what is ornamental; what helps oneself and others to get properly and decently through the tasks of family living, rather than what embellishes that living or perhaps even interrupts it. It was, in a sense, irrelevant if unusual individuals were perceptive artists or scientists, accomplished performers, or even advanced spiritual devotees.

These moral principles, this "bourgeois morality," was not left simply to the "common man." Under the influence of a populist tend-

ency to measure everything by standards relevant to the common man, the principles were given an exclusive position for all. The rule of the Sharîᶜah to ignore the exceptional was broken only to condemn the exceptional. The creative, the ornamental, the adventurous were not absolutely banned, but wherever a popular moral sense might be offended by them, they were set aside without mercy as frivolity or, still worse, innovation.

The populism of the Sharîᶜah was also, like Calvinism, individualistic; it emphasized private initiative, not state intervention, as have some forms of populism. But it was exceptionally systematic in its individualism. The Sharîᶜah emphasized individual equal and universal responsibility for all things social through such principles as that of the distinction between *farḍ ᶜayn* and *farḍ kifâyah*. That is, responsibilities were either incumbent upon every individual in any case; or else incumbent on any individual but only if some other individual was not taking care of the matter—the latter being the more "public" duties. It disallowed any corporative institutions which would *limit* an individual's responsibilities to a given territorial or functional body short of all Islâm (it has been pointed out that even the state, as such, had no existence, theoretically, apart from the social responsibilities potentially incumbent upon all believers severally).

Such a Sharîᶜah expressed at first the demand of the pious opponents of the early Caliphs, that the whole body of Arab soldiery, and then of urban Muslims, be given secure status and voice in the Islâmic social order. With the disappointment under the ᶜAbbâsids of earlier Muslim hopes for a reign of universal justice, the Sharîᶜah (still essentially oppositional) became the expression of the autonomy of society at large over against the absolutist monarchy. It could not successfully resist the power of the Caliphate, but it succeeded in taking away from it its ultimate legitimacy as a state power and so contributed to preventing the erection of an Islâmic Caliphate on as enduring a basis as the Sâsânî monarchy that had preceded it. Then, on the collapse of the Caliphate, it served as a means of legitimizing the popular institutions of society over against the military regimes which succeeded each other; but at the same time it prevented the legitimizing of any privileged corporative institutions which might be built on less than a universal Muslim foundation. If the Sharîᶜah did not actually mold Islâmic political life, it often succeeded in preventing it from taking contradictory molds in any stable way.

In contrast to Sâsânî times, the absolutist monarchy was never really accepted into society in the Middle Ages; monarchies had always to depend finally on alien troops, and, till the end of the Middle

Ages and the advent of gunpowder, passed through the fatal phases which accompanied a military regime alien to the social institutions of the people. Panegyrists made much of the absolute ruler, but the historical tradition of the Sharîᶜah ᶜUlamâᵓ, the one tradition with full legitimate status, was founded on a sense of the historical achievement of the People as a whole, rather than on a glorification of any monarch.

Correspondingly, there was no assurance in Medieval Islâm of the guiding hand of inherited wealth, with its ingrained taste (6). Ibn-Khaldûn noted the relative lack of great monumental architecture under Muslim rule. In several periods one can feel a tendency to quick building, to *nouveau-riche* display. Even secular architecture glorified not the monarchy as such but the individual ruler. Monarchy and aristocracy had only a precarious position for many centuries.

ISLÂMIC FACTUALISM

The popular bent of the Sharîᶜah-minded was unmistakable. But it was modified by other considerations. They had little patience for the lush folkloric imagination which is as prevalent among a city as among a rural populace. A common (hostile) name in earlier centuries for that Sharîᶜah-minded party which was forming what ultimately became Sunnî Islâmic orthodoxy in formal dogma and law was the Ḥashwiyyah—the men of the vulgar people, the Populists. Themselves learned ᶜUlamâᵓ, their policy was to accept popular notions so far as possible so as to maintain intact the solidarity of the ordinary persons of the community. Their distrust of any sort of uncontrolled elite, priestly or otherwise, extended necessarily to any profoundly specialized culture, such as that of the Faylasûfs, Greek-type philosophers and scientists. At first, extremists like Ibn-Ḥanbal distrusted any speculation at all, any Kalâm: anything transcending what might be managed by the sheer memorization of quiz kids.

We see these people as standing in contrast to the more unyielding Muᶜtazilîs, the early speculative theologians. But both groups grew out of a common background in Umayyad times, and the Ḥashwiyyah or (to use their own term) Ḥadîth-men were only pushing common tendencies somewhat further than the Muᶜtazilîs. (This fact can be seen in the relative ease with which, once elements of the Ḥadîth-men were later persuaded to accept Kalâm, speculative theology, at all, they adapted an essentially Muᶜtazilî spirit along with it.) The Ḥadîth-men, insisted, in contrast to the Muᶜtazilîs, on accepting somehow literally the anthropomorphisms of the Qurᵓân—God's hands and so on. To make these explicitly metaphorical was too intellectualist for them. But they made up for this concession to vulgar notions

with a decisive proviso: one must accept that God had hands or sat on a throne, but one must add *"bi-lâ-kayf,"* that is, that one cannot say in what *sense* He has hands or sits on a throne; for in any case they are not like our hands or our sitting.

To say *"bi-lâ-kayf"* of an image can have two functions. It may be a matter of avoiding its reduction to a single conceptual equivalent, so preserving all the ambiguities and polyvalences of the symbol without allowing some rationalism to capture it; this would be to maintain highly cultivated and perhaps aristocratic sense of symbolism. Or it may have the net effect of taking the image out of circulation—making it an extension of what was called the *mutashâbihât,* the doubtful passages in the Qurʾân which were not to be investigated. This is to concede a certain priority to popular tastes, but not to allow them to become offensive to the rational mind. In effect, it was the latter which men like Ibn-Ḥanbal did. Even the Ḥadîth-men, then, treated these images as, in effect, *mere* popularisms, to be respected but to be allowed no real content.

We have come now to another range of tendencies in Medieval Islâmic life, which is, however, to be correlated with the populism. I refer to phenomena some of which have been given the term "intellectualism," others of which have been included in a description of classical Islâmic thought as atomistic, or as utilitarian. What I want to stress is a certain factualism. We find a distrust in both the Muʿtazilî and the Ḥadîth-men circles (and among their later heirs in the study of Kalâm and Sharîʿah) of the expression of the whole imaginative side of life, the whole realm of myths and symbols; perhaps we can say, of whatever passes beyond the horizon of the unimaginative practical man. In this respect, the Muʿtazilîs, with their explanation that "God's hands" is simply a metaphorical turn of language for the relatively more common-sense notion of "God's power," came to the same result as the Ḥadîth-men insisting that one could not really know what the expression means at all: both rejected any true symbolism, any attempt at a mythical or visional or even truly allegorical interpretation, in favor of something quite matter-of-fact. In such matters, the ʿUlamâʾ were opposing the fancies precisely of the common people, not of any exceptional dreamers. It is as if the intellectual elite, which the ʿUlamâʾ were, when they did not allow a sophisticated flight of fancy to themselves were not prepared to stomach the unsophisticated flights of the public, but insisted on curbing them in the name of that undoubted bourgeois virtue, sobriety.

This spirit carries through the whole Sharîʿah-minded religious literature and then beyond it in secular spheres. Every symbolic im-

age dealt with is neutralized by reduction to something more familiar. In the commentaries on the Qurʾân, for instance, every mythical figure becomes a mere figure of speech. Following in the Muʿtazilî line, nothing is allowed which is not rationally comprehensible. If miracles are to be allowed, they must be thought of as simply a set of unusual events, strictly on the historical plane, their real awe being stripped away from them. They are allowed no special metaphysical status in the Kalâm. There is a magnificent Qurʾânic moment: God's offering the faith to the heavens and the mountains, and their refusing it as too much for them, before mankind finally undertook it. Even Ghazâlî turns this into prose when speaking to the public. The Rûḥ, which is clearly, in the Qurʾân, a part of a mythopeically conceived cosmic order, is merely Gabriel, one angel among others; and an angel is merely one more, if rather exalted, creature acting out the commands of God as He gives them from moment to moment; he really adds very little to the story, but must be admitted because he is in the Qurʾân and the people speak of him. The Qawl, again, clearly a more or less autonomous figure as it appears in the Qurʾân, becomes, as God's speech, merely the Qurʾân itself, the historically received *tanzîl*, revelation, fixed in direct human words and spoken at a given place and time. If there is any genuinely potent figure apart from God Himself, it is indeed the Qurʾân, given a privileged position as eternal miracle. The Qurʾân surely receives this status in part as symbol of the community life and its relation to God. But it becomes a singularly exclusive figure, in contrast, say, to that of the Christ, which automatically brings in Mary and a world of other figures. The Qurʾân, precisely as the symbol of the historical Muslim community, excludes all possible rivals.

A writer like Masʿûdî carefully records associations of one or another colored gem with one or another patriarch—hangovers of obvious symbolism—but one doubts if he attached any but an antiquarian value thereto. By the time one comes to Majlisî in Ṣafavî times, all such values are long forgotten, and gems are there only to dazzle the reader.

Even religious poetry, in the earlier period, was lacking in any rich symbolic imagery (as against superficial and standard similes); it concentrated on moralizing; and relatively abstract praise of Muḥammad and of Allâh took the place, at least among Sunnîs, of any graphic descriptions of sacred moments which might correspond, say, to the sufferings of Mary or the triumph of Israel at the Red Sea. It has been pointed out that the low estimate of the imagination, which was assumed by the Aristotelians in the Middle Ages, answered perfectly

to the temper of those who may be called the Sharîʿah-minded critics not only of religious poetry but of all poetry generally; and that the more cultivated and respected poetry did indeed bow as far as possible to the critics' most general requirements in this respect.

In this factualism, Medieval Sharîʿah Islâm stands in some obvious contrast to the Modern West, despite all our scientism. Especially the prosaism which goes with it is something we resent, not only in Medieval Islâm but in some other Medieval cultures. The story of David, for instance, so humanly beautiful in the Bible, is hopelessly deformed and debased by Muslim writers on the basis of Talmudic lore; it is only Moderns who have come to appreciate it again. But there are overtones here not unlike some tendencies in Modern pragmatism and utilitarianism. The position Ghazâlî expounds so deliberately—that only what is useful is to be encouraged—surely lies back of some of the willingness to accept such prosaic interpretations of matters we would expect to be handled poetically. Ghazâlî's own book on interpreting the Qurʾân, the *Tafriqah*, dealing explicitly with questions of allegorical meaning and so on, is constructed exclusively in this spirit, and in this respect Ghazâlî was never gainsaid by the Sharîʿah-minded.

ISLÂMIC HISTORICALISM

The factualism of Medieval Sharîʿah Islâm moves close to the naturalism and relativism of some groups of Moderns in the special case of the historicalism of Islâm. Muslims have been insistently historically minded. Even though they did cut their ties with the direct literary heritage of the Middle Eastern societies which preceded them, they retained a reasonably clear notion of what societies there had been and a certain interest in their stories. The story of the Muslim community itself, of its learned men at least as much as of its rulers, was most precisely documented with a minute and extremely matter-of-fact detail. This is a trait which persisted along with Islâm almost everywhere the faith went; it stood in marked contrast, of course, to the tradition of many Islamized lands; and though the earlier Middle East itself had not been neglectful of history, the advent of Islâm greatly intensified historical awareness even there. Indeed, the whole faith was explicitly founded on historical data, both the *tanzîl* revelation, and the Ḥadîth reports about the Prophet. Muslim Law, the classical triumph of classical Islâmic times, was a sort of applied history in a special sense.

The history, moreover, was conceived as a connected series of simple events, without any superhistorical apparatus. It was what has been

called atomistic. Each event happens in direct dependence on God's will—no dramatic development is allowed to it, no inherent cyclicism or culmination, no exemplification of hierophanies, only separate factual events. The practical historical community life was, after all, central to the sense of the Islâmic allegiance; the moments of disruption of the Community, notably certain moments in Islâm's early history, were conceived as the supreme temptations, the *fitnah*, of Islâm.

There is, in fact, a certain historicism in what became standard Sunnî Muslim theory, though it did not bear the full relativist implications of the Modern historicism. Against the Muᶜtazilîs, it was finally decided in Kalâm that right is right only because God so decrees it; and God, in fact, decrees it so only for a given moment: accordingly, Jewish law was right in the day of Jewish prophecy, even as Muslim law is right since the time of Muḥammad. As Muḥammad was now the last of the prophets, there was a historical assurance that moral norms would not change for the future: in practice, they were immutable. Yet it remains that it is in the form of factual history that the Sharîᶜah-minded Muslim scholar wished to conceive all those morally decisive moments that might in some cultures be elevated to a mythical cosmic time apart from the accidental sequence of our years. The fall of Adam (interpreted quite physically as a fall from the sky) was located not only in time but in a given spot which men can visit. Wonders did not interrupt history, they continued it. The sequence of time itself left no room for the world of symbol, either in a mythical past or in a superimposed *Heilsgeschichte;* it was as merciless as the time of a modern scientist.

After the formative ᶜAbbâsî years, in those currents of thought which had come to be associated with the Sharîᶜah-minded Islâm of the madrasahs, such prosaism was endemic; however, it appeared in connection with the other great forms of Islâm only so far as public decency might require.

ART AND THE MORAL CHALLENGE IN WORSHIP

To this point, we have been concentrating on certain social and intellectual pressures against symbolism and imagery. But we must turn to a more rarefied dimension of the sentiment in order to complete our analysis of the attitude of the Sharîᶜah-minded: to that dimension where the question becomes moral in the highest sense. For we face nor merely populism, not even just moralistic populism, but a moralistic populism based on a core of dynamic spiritual insight.

The whole populist orientation presupposes a moral outlook in its attitude; but we must distinguish at least two groups of specifically

moral motivations for a rejection of figural art, whether in worship or outside it. On the one hand, the fine arts are associated with luxury; more especially, as we have noted, with royal luxury. The simple life is not only honest but unadorned. Muslim puritans, like others, would no doubt prefer to avoid all art of any sort. The taboo in Ḥadîth against the use of gold dishes and the wearing of silk is of a piece with that against figured representations; such things are costly and wasteful and obvious occasions of prideful display. But some arts are less luxurious than others: all puritans seem to have accepted the chanted hymn or battle-song, which seems to require no special equipment. Even the Muslim Khârijîs, extreme puritans in the early times, accepted poetry, especially if it was sung in a good cause. Among the visual arts, it is clear that a touch of geometrical ornamentation on an object suggests less display, less attention to mere looks as against substance, than the reproduction of living beings. The purist distaste for figural representation even apart from religious contexts might well be derived from their distaste for luxury as such. This distaste, originally applied wholesale, may be formulated apropos of a limited number of specially objectionable cases; and whereas the wholesale distaste will not be honored by the rest of the community, at least the most objectionable cases will be avoided out of deference to those who do care; and reasons of some sort will be found for each particular case.

Related to the dislike of fine arts as luxurious is the dislike of them as superfluous, as non-utilitarian and therefore as frivolous. The moralistic attitude can readily reject what does not serve an immediate purpose in furthering one's own and one's neighbor's smooth living out of his proper life. The feeling extends likewise to fiction, of course: I believe it is not really so much because fiction is a falsehood that it is condemned (though that is the reason commonly given), but because it serves no functional end in the daily round of living. Accordingly, when Ḥarîrî wanted to defend his fictive tales, he quite properly defended their moral usefulness rather than waste time on the question of their truth or falsehood.

Both the above points deal with art at large—whether in the context of a worship service or not. If they applied especially to, say, the mosque, it would be by the accident of greater purist influence there where the purists focused all the force of their attention. These moral motivations can be widespread among the pious but they cannot move at the core of a dynamic faith; in themselves they can have only marginal influence. But a more powerful moral motivation is present at the heart of the Semitic-Iranian prophetic tradition. In the con-

sciences of the most sensitive persons, iconophobia is naturally a matter of worship itself. But it is an expression of a type of worship experience, in particular, which focuses on the moral implications of the worship, and is, consequently, an intensely moral matter. It is, then, on the level of worship that the hostility to symbolization receives its most intense moral impulse.

The moral force of an act of worship may be more intense if it is concentrated on the moral challenge of the Holy without any of the emotional luxuries of sentimentality, which may be genuinely religious but not directly moral in effect. The iconophobia of Islâm, on this level, is a particular case of the Muslim rejection of all sacraments as symbolic expressions of distinct aspects of the divine-human relation. This rejection will apply with special force to the whole context of the worship service itself, but it will also militate against all fine art, especially figural art, and all sorts of explicit symbolizations, whether visual or in writing and thought, because finally worship cannot be divorced from life.

The One expressed in the Qurʾân is above all the Presenter of a moral challenge to each individual, a challenge with which the very fabric of the Qurʾân vibrates. In the Qurʾân, if we are invited to contemplate the glories of nature, it is not that we may praise the beauty of God nor that we may stand in awe of His wisdom, but that we may be warned of His power to enforce His ordinances. If a person keeps his thoughts centered on the Qurʾân as the sole divine symbol, enormous emotional force can be developed which may mold his whole personality. The introduction of any other symbols beside the Qurʾân, however much they may point to other aspects of divinity, must necessarily, in the nature of symbols, share in, channel away, and finally dissipate the devotional energies. Quakers have had just the same objection to the Christian sacraments as false substitutes for the central experience which the Quakers find in their Silence. Alternative releases of the emotional force that should be focused in the Qurʾân are not alternative means of coming to the One: they divide and weaken the devotion to the One expressed in the Qurʾân, and to Its moral demand.

The objection to symbolisms, other than that which springs directly from particular moral feelings, is therefore associated rightly with the objection to the "idols" of heathen cults. There is some indication that iconoclasm proper, as a spirit hostile to *others'* images once they are already produced, developed within Islâm and within the other related faiths in the early Islâmic centuries *pari passu* with a tendency within the Middle East population—after turning Christian—not

merely to allow images but to emphasize their cult, even within what was expected to be a moralistic faith (7). In this way the image cult was becoming an internal threat within the Abrahamic tradition, and Muslims reacted. The exclusivism of a religion like Islâm and its mistrust of any imagery in worship both spring from the same roots.

It may be suggested that Sharîʿah Islâm does not in fact reject symbol and image. Like Christianity, it simply limits the range of symbols to be allowed religious validity. But its limitation on the use of symbol and image is more drastic than the Christian, which tried to eliminate only the most evidently pagan images. Sharîʿah Islâm insists that of the One God there can be but one image: what it excludes are not images as such but rival images. (It is then a point of theological nicety to avoid the implication that the Qurʾân, in practice adored so, is something other than God; this was achieved among Sunnîs through the dogma that it is not—that it is rather the eternal speech of God, not a created thing at all, and hence not an image like other images.) It is in this way that the Sharîʿah Muslim unitarianism has so profoundly moral a force: insistence on the Unity of God is the theological expression of the unity of the act of worship, its exclusive and undivided dedication to realizing the moral lordship of God over the individual worshiper.

It need not be stressed how much this is a fulfilment of the cited trends in earlier Semitic-Iranian religion since the time of the prophets. Whether the association of figural images with nature gods and of more abstract symbols, such as a flame or an empty room, with the moral divinities had originally any such motivation, the association here is forged into a profound psychological power.

But all life should be religious; hence a taboo which will apply to the moment of worship can logically be extended to all other circumstances. And this bears with special force on all forms of art, for art that is true to itself is not a mere pleasing of the senses, but evokes the whole spirit.

This last Christmas, the tree in our window was decked all in tiny white sparkling lights. Esthetically, it was a gem. Yet the points of light which it sent off up the street seemed less friendly than the colored lights in other windows, less welcoming. Perhaps there was an association of white with cold, of red and green with an open hearth and heart. Emotional associations, even some sort of symbolic overtones, were inescapable, and decisive for the human effect of the visual form itself. We may go further: there is no art without love—without something of the affirmation of living, at least. The fronts and rears of our slum buildings in Chicago bear witness here: in the façade there

is always some hope of expressing delight, at least of pleasing; and we know that on the part of some architects the hope was perfectly genuine, the pride in those uninspired façades was oddly real. There is always some trace of warmth, of generosity, of tenderness. In contrast, at the rear of the building there is sometimes only harshness, where necessities have been disposed of according to utility; that is, without art. Art, in expressing feelings, inevitably has implications in the moral realm, the realm of interpersonal human meaning. It is, then, at least semisymbolic, evoking orders of feeling beyond its immediate actuality, even if it carries no explicit symbols.

In fact all art tends, if fully developed, to be sacred art. Every act of appreciating a full work of art is something of a sacrament. If art cannot exist at its most meaningful without expressing some hint of symbolism, without therefore evoking at least some rudimentary worshipfulness, then Tawḥîd, the unitarianism of the Sharîʿah, faces a rival in any intense art, anywhere in life. Music, visual art, poetry, architecture, all the arts present this danger. All intense, symbol-bearing art can channel off, dissipate emotional energies which the Sharîʿah-minded wants to see reserved for the One and its moral demands as formulated in the Sharîʿah.

Here we have doubtless the strongest motivation among the very seriously concerned, to which other motives were ancillary, however strong their vulgar appeal. These few could not have enforced iconophobia. But without the persistent sanction of truly creative spirits, no iconophobic mood could have maintained its full potency.

To be sure, the logical outcome of this would be a ban not just on music and figural art but on all art; and indeed something like this was in the air. But this demand could not fulfil itself completely: even the most purist of the ʿUlamâʾ could rarely be quite so consistent, or if they were they could not impose their ideal to that extent on the whole community. They could erect absolute taboos only where a combination of other motivations allowed them to make a particularly cogent point. The association of such items as figural art and music with luxury and with a non-utilitarian spirit doubtless helped to make possible these particular taboos along with the taboo on gold and silk, with which the purely unitarian spirit had little to do (8). Probably music, poetry, and the depiction of the human form have been the most seductive arts. An inherited awareness that long ago figures of animals had been used for idols accounts for the half-hearted extension of the taboo on the human form to animal forms too. (The fury of the iconoclast was specially reserved for the human form, however.) But a like awareness that the old Arabic poetry had been intimately

bound up with the power of the soothsayer was not generally sufficient to extend the ban to poetry. Poetry was no luxury.

As to other elements of artistic expression, the unitarian devotional demand would have a subtler effect, not in the form of unenforceable taboos but in the form of a pervasively latent reservation about any creaturely object which might too deeply engage the spiritual powers. On this latter level, a half-conscious mistrust of any art that might be too seductive would be confronting the equally half-conscious force of symbolic imagery as it has dug itself into the human mind from the time of its birth in archaic times (9).

There was, then, a combination of tendencies in the Sharîʿah-minded stratum of Islâmic thinking which fought shy of the explicit symbol, and of the image in even literary form as it might express the symbol. Among the most sensitive it expressed a horror of any moral rivalry to the Qurʾân; in the least imaginative of the ʿUlamâʾ it reinforced a demand for a purely case-by-case matter-of-fact approach to all things. Moreover, the Sharîʿah-mindedness, carrying this group of tendencies, has had a key place in Islâm: it was associated by political circumstances with the historical, political orientation of the Muslim community; with its orientation to social responsibility, and to exercising that responsibility in terms of the life and interests of ordinary merchants and tradesmen. Although this was by no means the only form of Islâm (or perhaps, ultimately, the most prevalent in the practical spiritual life), it has had a special prestige in that it has been in a position to legitimize or refuse to legitimize all other tendencies as consistent with good Islâm or not. In almost all realms, as in that of the political life, if it withheld its legitimation, then what it frowned on might persist, indeed, but must be deprived of the disinterested long-term support which upholds a standard through favorable and unfavorable circumstances, and which strives for excellence independently of the interests of the moment.

But what we are dealing with is not merely a matter of moral and intellectual activity. The men most closely affected were neither devotees nor scholars, but artists. How did such considerations affect precisely the esthetic sensitivities? Even a lack of legitimation, however hampering, could not account alone for the special tone that the Sharîʿah movement seems to have imparted to Islâmic art generally. Something of a like spirit was found in all forms of monotheism without always having such drastic consequences in art. Explicitly esthetic problems must have played their part.

Even the most elementary adornment or even the "purest" decorative art has some moral-emotional, some semisymbolic content. But such a content has commonly been expressed more fully and more graphically, if not more directly, through the means of objective symbolism: that is, through symbolism explicitly accessible to all. This has been done especially through the representational image, and most notably the human image. The meaning of power can be expressed through the lineaments of a mighty man; of motherhood, through those of a perfect woman; of loneliness, through tiny figures portrayed against a waste. Each of these is an objective symbol already, even without what came further to enrich the meaning in many arts, the complex language of conventional symbols like the seashell or the dragon.

Not only in a rejection of conventional symbolism, which is significant enough, but even in a certain devaluation of the perhaps more immediate yet still objective symbolism of such images as those of the mother, the lover, or the man in fear, there is a certain trend in twentieth-century art which may be called iconophobic. In its completest form, this appears in our non-objective art, which is not merely abstract but explicitly rejects any representational image. Such symbolism as it has is expressly subjective and personal. The rejection of explicit symbol and image, that is, of any objective intellectual content other than a "pure" emotional impression, has led some extremists in most of the arts to make a point of composing by chance and then choosing those more or less chance products which immediately appeal. Thus they think to eliminate any conscious, intellectual manipulation of objective content. Even when such measures are not resorted to, however, there is in non-objective art a stress on the immediate emotional impact of the ocular content, rather than on any content of art which might be called philosophical. (In such an atmosphere, the art of children can be displayed on almost equal terms with that of adults: they may have an undeveloped sense of the range and problems of human life, but their immediate sense of the vital impact of form and color can be quite strong.) After a tour of such modern art, I am left with the feeling that I have just seen some wonderful experiments and scraps of effects; but when will the artists make use of these to paint something with content?

In our time, one is inclined to guess that such phenomena are possible because we are so flooded with works of art that we have time

barely to look at one and pass along to the next; we stay to live with none of them; and the degree to which art is museum-oriented only reinforces this. Hence one will look to new, striking esthetic effects, regardless of how transient the substance. But this is wrong; the artists often acknowledge that their works are experimental, but not that they are incomplete. No further dimension in the art is looked for. It is felt that the central effect sought is hindered by the use of symbol, by the presence of images: it is as if the depiction of the suffering lines of a human face, say, as a merely biological token of the invisible emotion, mediated between the experience of the artist and his viewer's perception; the artist tries to tear away the veil by eliminating the image and allowing the passionate lines to speak to the heart directly.

In the Cubist movement, the figure was still kept central; in the more abstract and non-objective strains of art, the figure has almost or entirely merged into a powerful background. But the point is not so much the relative prominence given to the figure, as the way in which it is used. When the figure served as image, as expression of symbol, the feeling was given through the delineation of smile or gesture: strength was shown in the presence of well-formed muscles or of a firmly shining eye; terror, through the mouth or the fingers of a terrified man. In certain twentieth-century art, the impact comes from the vigor or the convulsion of the lines themselves; it comes often from the total visual field, and the figure recedes to being a reminder of the experiential base, a point of departure. In direct visual engagement, without the mediation of any biological mechanics, the viewer participates in highly charged lines of force. If "purely esthetic" is what arouses, overawes, appeals to a person by its very visual qualities rather than through an explicit recall of something else, then this art is purely esthetic in dispensing with explicit symbolism.

There are some curious parallels here with what happened in certain forms of Medieval Islâmic painting. Timuri miniature painting is the most famous Islâmic figural art in the Middle Ages. (The later Ṣafavî and Mughal empires show a somewhat altered political and social temper from what we have described so far, and also an altered artistic temper.) This may be because, in Timuri painting, the esthetic challenge posed by the bourgeois-oriented Sharîʿah-mindedness was met with outstanding success. There was a time when Islâmic painting, carrying on a pre-Islâmic Middle Eastern tradition, had been above all a narrative art, where each figure told its simple story without any great subtlety of thought: a lively art, in many ways, but not really one of the greatest arts of the world. After the Mongol times, in the later Middle Ages, Islâmic miniature painting developed a sub-

tlety and magnificence which—perhaps unjustly—tend to eclipse what had gone before; the Timuri miniatures form indubitably one of the greater arts. But in contrast to the contemporary Renaissance art developing in Western Europe, where perspective had the effect of keeping the background back even when highly elaborated, in this Timuri art the figure shares attention with the background and even sometimes recedes into it. The effect can be related to certain twentieth-century art: the figure is no longer handled as itself a symbol, even though its presence, as in some abstract Modern art, is quite necessary for the impact of the work. Whatever feeling is present is not shown through any depiction of feelings in the figures themselves, for the most part, but through the combinations of colors and through the total pattern. What we get is, in fact, a sort of apotheosis of visuality, in which all other aspects of perception—tactile, kinetic, or what not—are cast aside in favor of pure visibility. The figures have no muscles, and stand on no firm ground; we do not feel them as moving, but only see them as forms among forms. The effect is a rather "pure" esthetic one in the sense suggested above, where it is the visual qualities as such that move the viewer, rather than a direct reminder of some other experience.

(This concentration on visuality is by no means the same, of course, as Wölfflin's *Malerisch*, which marks a departure from objectivity toward visuality *within* a representational context, where *things seen* still matter as such. The *kind* of seeing presupposed in the Timuri miniatures is surely more tectonic than *Malerisch*, if we must use his distinction, despite some evident affiliations with the "decorative" tendencies of the Baroque. The Timuri miniatures stress visuality on a different level—in contrast not to plastic values but to narrative values, to a sense of the *presence* of figures. What it brings are colors and shapes almost abstracted from experience.)

In these Timuri miniatures we have a specially successful peak within a much wider range of high points in Medieval Islâmic art, many of which display related characteristics. It was not merely that the image was tabooed in certain contexts; it lost status everywhere. This tended to be true even where concern with living figures could play no role. It was the representational image as such that was set aside or devalued in favor of some more direct evocation. And it may be precisely such a process that made possible the many unique triumphs of Islâmic art (10).

In the mosques, it is not just that presentation of human and animal figures, obviously tabooed, was banished. Even other sorts of symbolic art were reduced to a minimum there, apart from the phrases of the

Qurʾân itself. The ancient tradition of a shell over the niche—in this case, the *miḥrâb*, indicating the direction of Mecca—survived into the Egyptian mosques. In certain Fâṭimid-time mosques, especially, it is very impressive. But it no longer invokes the sea, let alone femininity; it has really at last ceased to be a shell. The impressiveness arises from the effective use of lines to concentrate the eye and the mind upon the empty niche; the converging lines have become simply a matter of formal design, whose spiritual content comes from its purely visual impact rather than from any representational symbolism.

Outside the mosque, where most pietistic taboos had little effect, the same is often true. In the arabesque and in related arts—for example, in the classical Persian carpets—no one item stands out. The art at its most magnificent has a quality akin to that of the explicitly background designs of delicate foliage and gazelles, say, surrounding a page of elegant calligraphy—not altogether different from, though on a much higher level than, the marbling on the inner leaves of a book binding. Designed as part of a wider décor, for instance as part of a building, it could rather unfairly be called a "background" art. It has also been interpreted—giving a slightly different twist to the same observation—as a response to, even a representation of, the divine Unity in which all details are submerged in a total seamless pattern: multiplicity is so intricately multiple as to illustrate monism. The art then would be a "background," if you will, to a monistic Divine One. (As in the extremer instances of Modern non-objective art, where the operation of chance is preferred to conscious control, an aleatory element can be said to enter into certain of the geometric patterns, insofar as once the elements of the design are given, the rest is largely determined in advance in ways not necessarily self-evident from the elements with which one has started!) This is only one sort of Islâmic art, indeed. But it seems to have a design tone comparable to that of Timuri miniatures.

Even where the figure is neither rejected nor submerged, it tends to be devalued, made prosaic. Statuary, to be sure, rarely escaped from the taboo, even outside the mosque. But figural painting was commonplace. Stories of Muḥammad and the prophets were sometimes illustrated explicitly, rather in contrast to this "background art." In such illustrations various details remind one of a symbolic tradition older than Islâm. Muḥammad is shown with a flame halo; his mount, in the heavenly ascent (often depicted) has a peacock tail; he is offered a choice of water, wine, and milk; he passes by the heavenly cock. When these pictures are analyzed, they prove closely dependent on the words of the Ḥadîth-reports, for the most part, which have

ceased to be living symbols in the sense that one can manipulate them, apply them to new situations, and so on. They are taken with a quite univalent literalism. Within Ṣûfî tradition, of course, the symbols were reactivated; but no one seems to see much undeniable impact from Ṣûfism in the figures of the graphic art themselves. In any case, the range of symbols in graphic art is much more limited than that of their equivalents in the iconography of Christian saints. And this is at least as much the case in art where the subjects are not even formally religious.

Certainly the whole tendency of most types of Medieval Islâmic art was in a direction which made a really vividly living representation of figures superfluous. Most schools of Islâmic painting seem to have looked as zealously as any Modern to the immediate, purely visual impact. One may add that the sense of shallowness which many observers have felt with regard to most Medieval Islâmic painting is not entirely unparalleled in the case of the Modern non-objective art. It is not purely philistinism which senses a certain impoverishment on the whole if one compares the twentieth-century non-objective art with, for instance, the Italian Renaissance art, where lines and colors received their force and yet the whole dimension of objective symbolic presence also lived in the paintings. Both the Islâmic painting and the Modern threaten, at least, to become merely decorative; merely concerned with the flat surface effect, a part of a wider décor, without any emotive vitality of its own. In the greatest instances, at least, this is not true of either; but it is an easy possibility for both.

REJECTION OF MYTH

There is a curious parallelism in a type of explanation for rejection or denaturing of the image that has sometimes been given for both Islâmic and Modern art. One can find Modern artists who will explain that they are expressing the mood, the deepest experience, of Modern mankind. They reject the image, in the old Renaissance sense, on the ground that it smooths over the reality unjustifiably; one might say that it flatters Man too much. The human image must be broken up and tortured; all semblance of what appears living and whole to us must be torn away to reveal the passion and the dying beneath. Medieval Muslim opponents of figural representation, if not Muslim artists themselves, sometimes said, on their side, that the human figure should not be represented because one must not try to present as alive a figure that is not really living. Hence zealous Muslims might draw a line across the throat of a represented figure, to mark it as clearly not alive. It has been suggested that this attitude influenced

Muslim artists against any suggestion of illusion, such as preoccupied Western artists for so long; the flat, dimensionless, unmuscled puppets which fill the miniatures were made purposely lifeless to disarm the critic in advance. It has been further suggested that the hope was not merely to avoid flattering the artist too much, with the idea that he, like God, could create; but to avoid flattering the human creature itself too much: it must be seen to be a mere helpless creature of the Almighty, not an independent being. At any rate, the art of puppeteering sometimes received a special approval from Muslim religionists on the ground that it presents the helpless reality of mankind.

It would probably be impossible to show that Medieval Muslim artists had any such intentions in mind; certainly some of them were reasonably proud of making their figures look more or less real (11). The Muslim artists were generally not so self-effacing before their Creator. But then do even those Modern artists who accept such explanations really see no wholeness or soundness in human life at all? So far as these impressions of motive have any validity, it is surely that they detect a loss of meaning, not in the human being but in the integral organic form of the human being: in its living fleshliness it is no longer a vital symbol. And in both cases, the symbol has been undermined because the sense of myth that lies back of it has been undermined.

Both Medieval Islâmic society and Modern society—in very different degrees, to be sure—have experienced what by Medieval norms was an unusual amount of cosmopolitanism, with extensive social and geographical mobility. In both, the ties with local place and tradition (springs of myth par excellence), even with nature itself, have been seriously weakened. Even apart from any general demoralization, this relative rootlessness must affect the realm of myth. For Medieval Muslims, it meant confirmation of the defeat of the nature gods and all that went with them, including the luxuriance of their myths. Nature myths are a type in which the symbolism of the human body has been specially rich. This defeat occurred, to be sure, in favor of the moral God; and hence made for a *concentration* of myth in the unitarian sense, so far as any myth did flourish. The reasons noted above as given for devitalizing the human figure represent this unitarianism at one level.

Among the Moderns is it, perhaps, that with our naturalism, our relativism, our historicism, our society too has tended to reject the myth, perhaps even that we have tended to reject it altogether? (12). That we have therefore debased all explicit symbolism and seem unable any longer to have a living image? The image, except as it springs

as symbol from myth, is lifeless; it will then be a matter of simple decorative imitation. (The sense of loss of human wholeness can be an expression of that.)

When the image is no longer alive, a Renaissance art, still in touch with faith, turns into "academic" art, which, as its name suggests, is desacralized art, designed purely for effect. Picasso's transpositions of Delacroix' Academic paintings indicate what then happens in the artist's mind, on the technical level. When the image has no serious sacred character left, the natural representation of the human figure becomes superfluous; Picasso abstracted the visual forces at play, and the result is not only legitimate but an undeniably better work of art. It is doubtful if Picasso could have done this so successfully to an artist of the Renaissance. If one has, then, simply decoration, will it not be better to cast aside the image altogether and not be burdened with it? Some architects of our midcentury geometric style do this directly, rejecting all ornamentation as a hangover from a more or less superstitious past, unsuitable to our rational, factual, functional present. The painters can hardly follow suit entirely, as they cannot really be "functional"; but some of them do their best.

I suppose that if Modern populist factualism has its proper art, it is "socialist realism"—a sort of debasement of that already disemboweled art called "Academic"—which true artists will produce only if paid to do so, precisely because it has no symbolic nuance, whatever gross symbolism it may depend on. "Socialist realism" represents a kind of iconophobia just as much as does non-objective art, in its own painfully populist way. In its literalism it even answers to some elements of the Medieval Muslim artistic consciousness (13).

Can one say that the Medieval Islâmic artists, not free (among traveling merchants and *nouveau-riche* soldiers) to present an imaginative symbolism which presupposed a rooted and homogeneous mythical tradition, but not being forced to produce "socialist realism," turned, like some of our Modern Western artists, to non-objective art; or at least to an art of immediate visual impact, free of the falsity of literal-minded images, whether it happened to include the depiction of objects or not? Surely the absence of a publicly legitimized mythical realm helped inhibit any attempt at a figural art of objective symbolical substance. Something of this sort will account for the points of similarity in the two cases (14).

The differences, of course, are also significant. A most indicative one is in the attitude to the completed product. The Medieval Muslim artist usually "finished" his work to the last impeccable detail, in contrast to a strong tendency to expressive roughness in twentieth-

century art (15). This is partly because the Muslim artist (like most pre-Modern artists) was a professional craftsman, dedicated to demonstration of fine craftsmanship above all, whether any other talent might be added or not. His first duty was to make a consummate embodiment of the glory of his patrons, or even of God Himself, which required a work as perfect in its details as in its whole. It could not be thought of as experimental, even when its artistic ideas, as often, marked a new departure; there could be no question of the transiently impressive for the disciplined craftsman. Consistently with this sense of craftsmanship, the effects looked to in the "pure" visual work were different. Instead of participation in an immediate personal emotion like terror, or the soaring of birds, or peacefulness, we have a more indirect, less subjective affect, a sense of splendor or of tenderness or of delight; that is, of various phases of beauty into which any subject matter was somehow etherealized through the craftsman's virtuosity. There was no hint of a violent shredding of the human image in an attempt to thrust into the open the inmost passions. It may well be also that, despite rejection of nature myth in general, still the fundamental sense of the interresonant wholeness of life, of the reality which underlies the mythical realm, remained; a sense which, in faith, was expressed in the unique symbolism of the Qurʾân. The moral realm stood essentially unbreached.

We may now summarize the relation of this esthetic consciousness of the artist to the social, intellectual, and spiritual forces mentioned earlier. It would not be sufficient merely to say, reducing the situation to a crude anticipation of Modern times, that the Medieval equivalent of the tired businessman, or of the bourgeois philistine, demanded something like an "academic" art, or "socialist realism" above the level of the naïve art of the poor but without the cultivated abstruseness or delicacy of aristocratic art; and that the visual artist, forced (unlike the writer) to express himself in terms common to all, and unwilling to paint figures from which the symbolic content had so been drained, turned to non-objective art or something near it. Without the Modern temper, this sequence could hardly be carried to its logical conclusion in the Modern sense. The non-objective tendency in Islâmic art had, in fact, its own positive character different from that of any Modern art. But some such esthetic problem must have led to the comparable consequences within the Medieval setting. A devotional distrust of any potent symbolism other than the one supreme symbol, seconded by the moralist-populist ʿUlamâʾ, could be translated through some such social-esthetic mechanism into an esthetic temper which would influence even artists with little dedication to the

Sharîᶜah ideals. The moralism of the devotee and the factualism of the populist scholar converged and joined hands to impose such limitations on the explicit symbolic efforts of the visual artist, that the artist found it most fruitful to explore less weighted lines of expression. His genius can be measured by the degree to which he rose to this challenge and created great arts which not only did not depend on explicit symbolism but required that it be suppressed or at least subordinated.

The conditions for expressing such genius do not seem to have been promising. Vulgar popular art continued to use the animal and even the human figure—crudely formed in sugar for children, for instance; no one seriously attacked little girls' dolls. But without the support of the cultivated artists, this popular art was stereotyped and derivative. Cultivated art became a secular work; but secular political life, deprived like art itself of legitimization by the common standard of society, the Sharîᶜah, could not provide transcendent ideals. The royal courts between the formative ᶜAbbâsid period and the sixteenth century were generally not far removed from the status of sheer military occupation; they did not have the cultural and moral substance of the Sâsânî court. What was looked for in art in such circles was not the imaging of major symbols, but the decoration of a splendid but rather transitory life. Many of the wealthy could appreciate the direct impact of non-symbolizing works, just as they did the nuances of intricate allusive verse. But until a quite late period the painter was still valued by most as no higher than the calligrapher. Just as Modern art, in some of its phases, does just as well on a bowl or a pitcher as on an independent canvas, so the Medieval Islâmic art was in fact often chiefly decorative: it could be almost as effective when livening up a pot to fit into a prince's décor, as when used to interpret a poem.

Despite all this, Medieval Islâmic art did not always succumb to the temptation to become decorative and insubstantial. In its subtle exploration of immediate visual beauty, it offered an alternative to objectively symbolic art which deserves high respect. It is even possible to see in much Islâmic figural art a greater objective symbolic presence than many critics now allow it. Certainly, in any case, an artist like Bihzâd rose to heights even in figural representation which in the eyes of many critics are worthy of the wider art tradition of Islâm which went on later to produce the Taj Mahal in a medium where few will deny the art's spiritual stature, in architecture. In literature, of course, the romantic and imaginative flourished in great diversity and profusion. In general, in fact, a closer analysis of Medieval Islâmic culture leaves one less ready than at first to concede any "burning-out" theory such as Kroeber's, any doctrine of Islâm's

cultural aridity, even on the evident levels.[3] But Islâmic iconophobia, if in some ways a marginal phenomenon, does represent a significant feature in Islâmic culture: a matter of the tone of the culture, perhaps, rather than of the substance altogether (16). Whole sides of life, especially of spiritual life, are rarely (as in the special case of sculpture) excluded almost altogether; and even in Medieval Islâmic painting, we find that our first impression of a lack of spiritual significance must be seriously modified. That is, little is really ruled out from the culture. But a more important thing happened to the internal dynamics of the culture.

ṢŪFĪ AND ᶜALID LOYALIST MYTHOPEISM AND ART

Sharīᶜah-mindedness was hostile to the symbolical and imagistic sides of life in every realm and not merely in regard to visual figures. What happened to this dimension of life otherwise? At this point one must turn to the other great tendencies in Medieval Islâmic spiritual life. Sharīᶜah-mindedness was not, after all, the only force that might determine the religious environment of the artist. When I speak of Sharīᶜah-mindedness, of course, I mean as much the Shīᶜī as the Sunnī; for in matters of Kalâm and Fiqh, they came to much the same thing. But there was a tendency which may be called ᶜAlid loyalism within both the formally Shīᶜī and even the formally Sunnī groups; it exalted, with the family of Muḥammad, the mythical-symbolic value of the more tragic events in the life of that family. It denied, essentially, the political success of Islâm, asserting that the apparent general triumph of Islâm was illusory because power was in the hands of tyrants, the mass of the people were misled, and the true justice for which true Islâm stood was trodden underfoot and awaited an apocalyptic intervention. The more consistent among men of such views were hostile to the factualism and historicalism of the ᶜUlamâ᾽, and usually supported an explicit elitism: the loyal few who understood were the elect set off from the bemused many. They might be persecuted and suffer, but finally they would be exalted as the special friends of God. Among the representatives of ᶜAlid loyalism one finds a lush development of mythopeic cosmic symbolism of all sorts.

ᶜAlid loyalism, especially in the several Shīᶜī sects, gave back to the cosmic figures alluded to in the Qur᾽ân something of their independent

[3] In the case of the Muslim religion itself, as compared with Christianity, I have tried to demonstrate this in "A Comparison of Islâm and Christianity as Frameworks for Religious Life," *Diogenes*, No. 32 (Winter, 1960), pp. 49–74. Note that the article, as printed in *Diogenes*, was abridged and some unfortunate errors crept into it as well. The full form, with corrections, will be found in Reprint No. 10 in the series of the Committee on Southern Asian Studies of the University of Chicago.

symbolic quality. This happened most systematically, indeed, in the Ismâʿîlî Shîʿî movement, whose interpretation of the *bâṭin*, the "inner," "esoteric" meaning of the Qurʾân, went to an extreme in its unhistorical, antifactual approach, just as the movement itself was most extremely revolutionary on the political level. But among the Twelver Shîʿîs also the same sorts of figures and interpretations were prevalent. Even within what may be called Sunnî ʿAlid loyalism (*tashayyuʿ ḥasan*), which more and more colored the whole of the Sunnî community, came a milder version of the same thing. Its cosmic exaltation of the Prophet, its reverence for his descendants, even its expectation of a Mahdî are contrary to the stricter Sharîʿah spirit. This ʿAlid loyalist tendency has been expressed even outwardly among Sunnîs in the ritual. The Sunnîs of India, like the Shîʿîs, for an extreme but not misleading instance, have their processions at Muḥarram, with lamentations for the ʿAlid heroes Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, in which the tragic events of Karbalâʾ are given a standing transcending sheer history; and they have their own *taʿziyah* figures which they carry in procession, representing (to be sure) not a human being but a tomb. Here, the revival of myth has come close to reviving an art of sacred objective representation. Among the professed Shîʿîs it has gone so far as to produce staged drama, which the Shîʿî ʿUlamâʾ are forced to tolerate.

Nevertheless, the normal position of most of the popular Shîʿî groups, in which ʿAlid loyalism was carried furthest, was that all such matters must be kept secret—not only to avoid persecution but to avoid profaning the Truth. The official Sunnî ʿUlamâʾ of the majority must not be allowed to hear of them; and even the Shîʿî ʿUlamâʾ, who maintained their own Sharîʿah-mindedness, were often trusted no further. The largest development of ʿAlid loyalist symbolism was in esoteric writings and esoteric ceremonial.

The other important movement in Medieval Islâm, apart from Sharîʿah-mindedness in the strict sense, was of course Ṣûfism, again among both Sunnîs and Shîʿîs. Here again the symbol, the myth, the vision came into their own. The free literary images of Ṣûfî writers like Ibn-al-ʿArabî or Rûmî are notorious. The factual, historical outlook is made light of, and any idea of spiritual equality disappears in outright mystical hierarchism. But again the lore in which such an attitude prevailed was regarded as esoteric, as meant for the élite only. And again the Ṣûfîs, though they sang and danced and almost literally idolized their shaykhs, did not go so far as to make cult statutes or even paintings. There was neither a Ṣûfî nor an ʿAlid loyalist school of devotional painting, though a few paintings were

inspired by ᶜAlid loyalist or by Ṣûfî writings (17). The richness of Ṣûfî symbolism, also, was developed in the esoteric realm. Both ᶜAlid loyalism and Ṣûfism allowed themselves to be sufficiently dominated by legalist Sharîᶜah-mindedness to maintain (usually) the taboo on the visual image; accordingly they failed to provide the general artist with the symbolic content requisite for a rich figural art, so far as it could not be accommodated esoterically.

ESOTERIC ELITISM

We have seen that the visional-symbolic sides of life, both in ᶜAlid loyalism and in Ṣûfism, excluded by the dominant factualism from legitimized public expression, became esoteric. All the Medieval civilizations went in for esotericism; but none were so preoccupied, surely, as the Islâmic with what could and could not be said to the general public. After the fall of ᶜAbbâsid power, almost every great thinker in Islâm who touched on central philosophical and religious issues asserted in lesser or greater degree the doctrine that wisdom and truth beyond a certain point should be concealed from the ordinary man, for his own good. The scholars of the Hellenic sciences, at least after the time of the eccentric Râzî, were agreed in this; I have mentioned the secret alchemists and astrologers, with their rich symbolic tradition. The Ṣûfîs always cited the example of Ḥallâj, punished for revealing hidden truths; the Shîᶜî ᶜAlid loyalists appealed to *taqiyyah*, protective dissimulation, not only to protect the individual believer from persecution by the Sunnîs but in many cases to protect the truth itself from profanation.

For the egalitarian social mobility of Islâmic society, which Sharîᶜah-mindedness was to support and foster, left no room for a public élite. An élite must become esoteric—even when, as eventually in the case of Ṣûfism, it was able to command enormous public support and receive the co-operation of most of the Sharîᶜah scholars, the ᶜUlamâ᾽. Imaginative, visional writing could not be protected by caste rules or by the paternalistic care of a church; lacking such defenses, it would be open to the anger or—worse yet—the ignorant and dangerous distortion of the masses if it were a public matter. Only the dry products of a historicalist factualism, molded in the form of a comprehensive legalism, were allowed to have public dignity and standing.

For imaginative literature, this esoteric status meant, at least, a shift in emphasis and tone; nowhere else would the manner of Ibn-al-ᶜArabî, immensely free and immensely unintelligible, have become the hallmark of the wise man; but Ibn-al-ᶜArabî did do his work. To a degree, the elite had a different set of images from the mass or at least used them differently; in literature this was reasonably satisfactory.

The most important of Medieval Islâmic literature came to be put in what may be called a mythic-visional genre: writing expressing a sense of life's whole through symbolic and mythic portrayal. Of this genre, Ibn-al-ᶜArabî, who drew from all lines of earlier thought, is the type. Ghazâlî's most interesting—and unreadable—work is of this sort (Mishkât al-Anwâr, etc.); Yaḥyà Suhravardî and the other Ṣûfîs, to say nothing of the Ismâᶜîlîs, illustrate at once its richness and its inaccessibility. The persistent tradition of it in later Iran has been brought to the threshold of our awareness by the work of Henry Corbin. Apart from this high tradition, there is a vast amount of esoteric material, including much occultism from the "degenerate" age of Ṣûfism, which rests in fact unexplored. We do not know what it might really yield from the viewpoint of symbolic expression.

Visual art, in contrast to literary, was almost inherently public (18). Here the multitude and the elite must share their images if an objectively symbolic type of art was to flourish, at least in pre-Modern conditions. Art might, indeed, be private in the sense of being kept within mansion walls; but it could not be truly esoteric, and therefore an objectively symbolic art could not be at all. Hence the tendency—even though not an exclusive one—for Medieval Islâmic art to be essentially non-symbolizing. (It is curious that it is precisely since the day when an important school of artists has found it necessary to break up the representational figure in art that there has also been a rising appreciation among a Western elite for mythic-visional and symbolic *writing* of all sorts—including that of the Medieval Muslims.)

My thesis seems to be that iconoclasm was a rigorous outcome of the moral concentration of prophetic monotheism, given social effect by the populism, and the related mistrust of aristocratic society, that resulted from commercial and cosmopolitan life in the Afro-Eurasian regions after the enormous shakeup of Classical times. Of this cosmopolitan and moralistic commercial world culture, Islâm was the most uncompromising and perhaps the most logically complete exponent. In this role, it was guided by the Sharîᶜah and its spokesmen, who by historical circumstances had gained a veto power in public life. In this spirit, the Sharîᶜah-minded refused to legitimize any aristocratic institutions and culture. In particular, the visual image was rejected by the Sharîᶜah-minded because the realm of myth and symbol, in their more subtle senses, was rejected first; rejected as inconsistent with the required frame of mind: a moralistic devotion to a single image which excluded rivals on the one hand, coupled with a factualist temper suitable (from the viewpoint of its intellectual guardians) to a universal individualist commonalty. In the face of Sharîᶜah resistance,

accepted as normative by a cosmopolitan and relatively rootless society, it came to be that neither in formal religious institutions nor in any other public channel could the visional-symbolic work of the mind find the conditions of a stable and public cultivation. Visual artists consequently devalued the image even where it was permitted, for want of a high symbolic content, and substituted non-symbolizing esthetic norms. Other such interests were driven into an elitist esotericism, linked to the symbolic life of the actual people not through the official public urban cult, but chiefly through the only semi-official institutions of Ṣûfism, which could not lend legitimacy purely on their own. Since all higher culture was bound up with the symbolic realm, such circumstances made all higher aspects of Medieval Islâmic culture less accessible from the outside; in particular, they made a cultivated symbolic visual art very difficult. This special twist in the form in which symbolic insights were expressed in Islâmic life has been combined with certain less fundamental accidents of history to yield the impression of aridity so often gained by outsiders (19).

In the case of Islâm, the realm of the symbol did not die—it veiled itself. It is not impossible that something partly analogous may happen again.

NOTES BY OLEG GRABAR

1. It is quite true that there is a symbolic possibility in the garden and the garden-carpet. And it is true that, among the mystics and the poets, there was a vision of an idealized garden. But is it equally true that the Muslims made that precise identification between a garden and its symbolic meaning? On gardens see a recent book by D. Wilber, *Persian Gardens and Garden Pavilions* (Rutland, Vt., 1962).

2. The decadence of sculpture is a phenomenon of the fourth to fifth centuries A.D. and is related to certain shifts in ideas in the early Middle Ages (cf. A. Grabar, "Plotin et l'esthétique médiévale," *Cahiers Archéologiques*, Vol. I). In fact, I feel, what has to be explained is the revival of sculpture in the Romanesque period in the West, not its absence in Islam.

3. I have often wondered whether the Koranic statements about *aṣnām* and *anṣāb* were part of a Judaic-influenced bugaboo or a genuine concern. I would like to point out that, in most of the Mediterranean, *statues* had lost the meaning, but not paintings or icons.

4. I would beware of the "common-root" notion (cf. A. Grabar, *L'Iconoclasme byzantin* [Paris, 1957]).

5. One must look at each period separately. The Muslim "bourgeoisie" will be one of the first innovators in Islamic art, in Fâṭimid Egypt, in Northeastern Iran, and especially in the Fertile Crescent, but these phenomena will take place at different times and each can be explained separately. The central point is, however, that the bourgeoisie develops an artistic expression of its own some time *after* it becomes identified as a social class. The reasons for this are not yet very clear to me.

6. Basically true, but there are exceptions, the most important one being in Arab cities, where, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there began to develop a relationship between city land and "bourgeois" building which implies a tradition of taste and of money carried in specific families.

7. This point is, to my mind, *absolutely central* and I should like to comment on it a bit longer. The criticism I would make of what preceded is that it is, partly,

an ex post facto exposition of the trends of thought which explain the maintenance of a certain "iconoclasm" in Islam. As pointed out earlier, the infant Islam of Medina had no feelings on the matter of art, because it did not penetrate into its consciousness. It seems to me that the central point to consider here is *when* did artistic creation penetrate into Islamic consciousness and *what* was it that penetrated. On the first point, the answer is easy: Artistic creation penetrated Islamic consciousness during the conquest, especially the period from *ca.* 640 to 715 or 724. *What* was it? It was mostly of two types: (*a*) from the East (i.e., from Ctesiphon eastward) objects and wondrous buildings, i.e., the royal luxury mentioned earlier; (*b*) in Syria, Egypt, etc., the most developed iconic (i.e., miraculous and "active") imagery (I always prefer to talk of images rather than of statutes) that had been known since early historic times. In every town, in every village, there were representations of Christian history which were participating in the lives of men, from the miraculous image of Christ which saved Edessa to some face of a saint which cured of epilepsy. In addition, all these conceptions affected—or were originally affected by—an imperial art (cf. text and ideas gathered in my article on the Dome of the Rock, *Ars Orientalis*, III, esp. n. 122 and following). To this the Muslim reacted, but these were the usual reactions: (*a*) jealousy, hence no images; (*b*) if you can't lick them, change the rules of the game; etc. It is only later that philosophical justifications were given to it all by recalling the appropriate Kuranic passages. And it may indeed be that a *populist* attitude was involved in it all, in the fashion of certain Protestant reactions to Catholic imagery. But my point is basically here that Muslim iconoclasm (I prefer to call it "reluctance to images") was not so much the result of a precise Islamic characteristic as a reaction to the type of images which existed at the time of the conquest.

8. On the Massignon-Ettinghausen view on gold and silk, cf. criticism and texts gathered by Ağa-Oğlu in *Art Bulletin*, 1954. It is a very debatable point.

9. On this business of opposition to music and the like as "seductive" arts, there is a study to be made on the theme of the *awwalu man*, i.e., of the literary theme of the first Muslim who started music, painting, hunting, etc. What seems to me to appear is that little by little—often criticized by your sharīʿah-minded fellows—certain men begin to engage in activities which may have existed in the *jāhiliyah*, but which now—at least for the ninth- tenth-century writer—appeared as an early perversion of an ideal Islam. In almost all instances these are activities related to the arts. But, if we turn this around and look at it no longer with the eyes of the sharīʿah-minded but as a cultural phenomenon, what appears is that a sort of naturalization into Islamic culture of phenomena and practices characteristic of the pre-Islamic Near East took place. This is how Umayyad art was created.

10. The basic point here—that of a parallel non-objectivism of modern and Islamic arts—is acceptable and has been made before, although not quite in the same terms. There is one unusual *distinguo* to make, however, and that is whether there is an equal degree of consciousness in things done today or in Timurid times. In other words, can one equate a conscious rejection of objective symbolism and creation of a "theory" of creation with an art of painting in the 1400's which apparently did not have a theory—as obviously the Renaissance did with Ghiberti and Vasari? If so, is one entirely right in giving these the same explanation? I hate to show again my *Historismus*, but I should like to search for certain historical conditions which in the late fourteenth century transformed early fourteenth century painting (which by the way has few of the characteristics mentioned) into an art which (*a*) is here described correctly, and (*b*) became classical for 150 years. However I have not yet discovered the reasons for the change.

11. It is true that Muslim artists thought of reality. In fact we do not have anywhere enough texts on the subject, but those which have been found all point to the fact that the artists thought of representing things as they were (especially true of action). But what did an artist of the eleventh century in Egypt or a Behzad *mean* by reality? Plato and Plotinus meant entirely different things.

12. I have to protest against the notion that we have rejected myth or explicit symbolism in art. We have simply changed the forms in which we expect it. Advertising fulfils for us the purpose of a Madonna of old. This is a view about which I have had many arguments with colleagues, but I feel that we often err in considering the evolution of techniques and in assuming that the same techniques will have the same purposes throughout the ages. What remains is symbolism; techniques change. Painting today is in a state of decay, because advertising, the movies, photographs *are* the symbol-making media of our time.

13. On the matter of socialist realism, I rather feel that it is an art of the masses and deals with symbols understood by the masses; it is a debasement of "academic" art only from the point of view of the history of painting; but, from the point of view of symbol or myth-making, the celebrated image of Stalin standing just behind Lenin, when the latter arrived in Petersburg in 1917, is of tremendous significance, for it was a justification of Stalin's power; it is exactly like an image of Louis XIV in Roman imperial clothes, or of Augustus.

14. I hate to have to answer this question. The implication of the question is that the artists chose their images; I rather feel that it was the patrons and to them, because of the comparative dryness of the faith, secular wealth was the idea; and I would rather connect the "non-objective" elements of Islamic art with attempts to imitate industrial arts: rugs, metalwork, silks, etc. The value of the objects (except in the strange period 1150–1300) was in this decorative—rich-making—quality, and it is this quality which gave them a symbolic value. But all of this is still in the realm of hypothesis and the stated hypothesis is more classical than mine.

15. On the question of "finish," I wonder; many Muslim objects are *not* well finished, but how representative is what we have? Perhaps also we have looked at them in too much detail.

16. That Islamic iconoclasm was somewhat "marginal" to Islam must be repeated over and over.

17. On the point of Ṣûfism and art, this is probably right, but could one pose the question in another way? Could the imagery and symbolism of Ṣûfism not have been partly inspired by visible things and works of art in the same sense that it picked up a symbolic vocabulary from royal life? (Cf. Ettinghausen in *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. IV, which is very important for these purposes.)

18. Is this not what so clearly distinguishes Islam from the Christian world? That in Islam visual effects *became* private (and autocratic) and literature became public (because so much of it was at the same time *oral* and *written;* compare the manner in which a Shâfiʿi and a Mâwardi taught with that of Aquinas).

19. These conclusions are, I feel, both very interesting and quite acceptable. And I would not quarrel with the points made on prophetic monotheism, populism, mistrust of aristocratic society, or commercial life. My sense of misgiving comes from a partly still unformulated idea that the problem is not posed right (this goes for a whole tradition of Islamic scholarship). What I mean, rather crudely, is that this has fallen into the trap of the ʿulamāʾ, i.e., the trap of the wordy sharîʿah-minded fellows here analyzed so well. For it is assumed that they have set an Islamic tone for the whole of Near Eastern culture from *ca.* 700 to 1800. Now, it seems to me that one must pose the problem differently. (1) A reluctance to imagery appeared *ca.* 700 because of what images were then, not because of what Islam was. That the notion of prophetic monotheism helped in creating a doctrine is certain, but it is not prophetic monotheism which forced the issue. (2) Distrust of aristocratic society existed, but, since aristocracies were constantly created in Islam, they developed an artistic expression, namely, Umayyad palaces, Fāṭimid treasures, Īlkhânid or Timurid miniatures. These set the tone of artistic taste, in the same sense that a contemporary social and intellectual élite has set the tone for our own conceptions of art, which are also rejected by the masses. (3) Populism and commercialism developed their own art, namely, Maqāmāt illustrations and Persian pottery; this art included a symbolic system, but, as in most "bourgeois" systems, it was limited to copying life, except in those instances (Persian pottery), where Ṣûfism gave it a wider symbolic content. It did not last, not because of the power of the ʿulamâʾ, but because of the decadence of the bourgeoisie. These are all terribly random thoughts and I apologize. We really should have a conference not on iconoclasm, but of where symbols and myths were.

All together this is a fascinating analysis, with which I disagree in part not because of existing facts or evidence missed, but because of certain still unformed views of mine which start from a different point of view, i.e., to try to explain each artistic form *in its time* as a central theme, and then in its development as formative of taste, of an "imaginary museum." The question, to me, is: Here are objects and monuments identifiable in time and space; they have analyzable characteristics; how were they seen? Why were they made? Thus we reverse the process and go from "things" to ideas rather than to look in "things" for a confirmation of ideas.